

June 26, 2017

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC, 20150

The Honorable Robert Casey
United State Senate
393 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins and Senator Casey:

Thank you for your bipartisan work to raise visibility and provide support to families across the country where grandparents or other relatives are raising children. We, the undersigned, write in strong support of the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act (S.1091).

More than 2.5 million grandparents across the U.S. report they are responsible for raising their grandchildren. More than 7 million children are being raised in “grandfamilies,” households headed by kin- a grandparent, great-grandparent, uncle, aunt or other relative who is not their birth parent. These grandparents and other relatives step in to provide safe and stable homes to children who cannot remain with their parents. The number of these families has recently increased, a phenomenon attributed to the opioid crisis.

When children cannot remain with their parents, research shows living with grandparents or other relatives reduces trauma, increases stability, reinforces safety and well-being, helps keep brothers and sisters together, and honors family and cultural ties. Yet, the grandparents and other relatives who step into this role face great challenges and do so at great personal sacrifice. Unlike parents or foster parents who plan for months or years to care for a child, grandparents and other relatives often step in to raise the children unexpectedly with little to no support. Suddenly they are forced to navigate complex systems to help meet the physical and cognitive health needs of children who come into their care, often after experiencing significant trauma. Taking on the unexpected expense of a child can be especially devastating to caregivers living on fixed incomes. Countless grandparents report spending down their retirement savings to address the health, mental health, food and clothing needs of the children, or to pay legal expenses from seeking legal custody of the children.

The Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act would help these families by providing a one-stop public source of federal information on resources and best practices to help these grandparents and other relatives meet the diverse needs of the children in their care as well as maintain their own physical and mental health and emotional well-being. Furthermore, by creating a federal task force to issue a report to Congress on best practices, resources, and gaps in services, the legislation takes critical steps toward improving the availability and quality of services to help grandfamilies across the country.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical legislation. We look forward to partnering with you on this effort as well as exploring future opportunities to provide broader support for children and caregivers in these families.

Sincerely,

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Academy of Pediatrics
Arizona Grandparent Ambassadors
Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance
Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw - Grandparents as Parents Program
Child Care Aware of America
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
Families and Children Together
Family Focused Treatment Association
Family Service Society of Yonkers
Fort Greene Strategic Neighborhood Action Partnership
Foster Kinship
FosterClub
Generations United
Grand Family Coalition, Inc.
GrandFamilies of America
Helping and Lending Outreach Support
iFoster
Jewish Federations of North America
Lutheran Services in America
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health
National Association of Counties
National Center on Adoption & Permanency
National Council on Aging
National Foster Parent Association
National Indian Child Welfare Association
National Kinship Alliance for Children
New York State Kinship Navigator
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Partners for Our Children
Project GRANDD
Voice for Adoption
WordGatherers Publishing LLC
Wyoming Kinship Advocacy
ZERO TO THREE